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ABSTRACT

Community service is excellent for students if done in proper circumstances. There should be worthwhile, carefully chosen, objectives for learner attainment. Learning opportunities need to be safe and emphasize the psychology of education. Noting that he has supervised student teachers in the public schools for 30 years, the author of this paper states that he has been cognizant of several activities participated in by students, particularly visiting and reading to nursing home residents and performing in talent shows at senior citizen centers. According to the paper, the objectives for doing service learning need to follow a definite criteria--knowledge objectives need to emphasize key facts, concepts, and generalizations, and students should have room to identify problem areas they wish to learn about. The paper also states that skills objectives should be for students to use knowledge pertaining to service learning in a life-like situation, and that functional objectives should be stressed in the curriculum. It explains that another category of objectives emphasizes the attitudinal domain, such as feelings of caring for the welfare of others, seeing the world holistically, emphasizing citizenship, stressing ethical relations, and working together harmoniously with others. The paper stresses that the psychology of learning has much to offer in developing and implementing a quality service learning curriculum and cites six instructional principles. It finds that the portfolio approach may be used to indicate learner achievement in community service and offers 10 examples of what might appear in a student's portfolio. (Contains 13 references.) (NKA)

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The Language Arts and Community Service.

by Marlow Ediger

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THE LANGUAGE ARTS AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

There is a clamor for pupils to be involved in more and diverse kinds of course work in the school curriculum. Preparing pupils for state mandated tests, character education, teaching morality, emphasizing the basics adequately, cooperative learning, democratic living, and values clarification, among others, places high demands upon teachers and school administrators. What, if anything, needs to give and be replaced in curricular offerings? No, doubt, community service is excellent for pupils if done in using proper circumstances. Thus, there need to be worthwhile objectives for learner attainment. These must be carefully chosen. Learning opportunities need to be safe and emphasize the psychology of education in its emphasis. Evaluation needs to be stressed to ascertain if the objectives have been achieved by pupils.

Community Service and the Pupil

The concept of community service is not new, but has been stressed in degrees by classroom teachers and encouraged by the school principal. In supervising student teachers in the public schools for thirty years, the author has been cognizant of the following activities participated in by pupils with student teacher and cooperating teacher guidance:

1. presenting programs, visiting with and reading to nursing home residents. In small cities of 2000 to 5000 population, these homes are very close in distance to the local school.
2. performing in a talent show to residents in senior citizen centers. Here, pupils have also displayed art work, related to different units of study in the curriculum.
3. visiting with and preparing treats for selected patients in a nearby hospital.
4. writing and sending get well messages to pupils who are ill.
5. helping to keep the school yard/classroom clean and tidy (See also Ediger, 1993, 12-15).

Many pupils are members of boy scouts and girl scouts who have done the following for the community: raking fallen tree leaves in fall, cleaning gutters on the house from leaves, painting a porch for an elderly, poor person, and delivering baked cinnamon roles donated by the high school to underprivileged neighborhood homes.

The objectives for doing service learning need to follow

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definite criteria. The knowledge objectives need to emphasize key facts, concepts,and generalizations. Thus when visiting a nursing home, pupils should understand and attach meaning to the following:

1. why persons are in a nursing home.
2. what categories of patients are in a nursing home.
3. which state requirements a nursing home needs to meet.
4. what the requirements are in terms of education to be employed in a nursing home.
5. what happens when nursing homes do not meet these criteria? (Ediger, 2001, Chapter Nine).

There should also be room for pupils to identify problem areas they wish to learn about. Here, pupils have opportunities to gather necessary information from a variety of reference sources. Tentative solutions might then be arrived at. These solutions need to be tested and modified, if need be. When pupils ask questions contextually, they desire explanations and discussions to clarify thinking. There are gaps in knowledge that need to be filled. Then too, curiosity is a marvelous trait for learners to possess. With curiosity, the chances are good that pupils are achieving many vital objectives of instruction in service learning.

A second category of objectives for pupil attainment are skills ends. Skills emphasize that pupils use knowledge pertaining to service learning in a life like situation. Thus, it is important for pupils to use and apply facts, concepts, and generalizations achieved contextually. Knowledge is then not acquired for its own sake, but to be stressed within a service learning opportunity. Knowledge and skills then become one, not separate entities. The language arts areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing become functional in a service learning setting. Social studies becomes useful in developing and using civic and human relationship skills. Science and mathematics subject matter may well be applied in context with its objective content and ways of thinking (Ediger, 2001, Chapter Ten).

Service learning has functional objectives to stress in the curriculum. Thus for example, pupils need to be conscientious individuals in taking their roles and tasks seriously in service learning. They need to persevere in service learning until a given task has been completed. Self assessment in evaluating the quality of work performed is important. Feedback from self assessment and from supervisor evaluations must be used to raise the level of work quality. Skill in using academic knowledge

is important. Thus, communication skills, in particular, need to be emphasized such as reading/writing connections along with speaking and listening goals. Developmental experiences need to be in the offing. If the expectations are too high, failure might well be preordained for the pupil. If standards are too low, then boredom and low motivation may be stressed. Learners need to perceive reasons for participating in service learning. The inherent reasons perceived might well aid to increase energy levels for participation in service learning.

A third category of objectives emphasizes the attitudinal domain. The feeling dimension is a salient factor in stressing service learning. Feelings of

1. caring for the welfare of others. Selected groups in society have been left behind due to poverty, ill health, old age, bereavement, and unfortunate circumstances. These need to have assistance and attention by others in the societal arenas, including public school pupils.

2. seeing the world holistically. Too frequently, attention in society is focused upon personalities in the field of professional athletics, television and movie stars, political leaders, wealthy industrialists, and those who have achieved fame in diverse other endeavors. The focus then is upon the wealthy, those of high visibility, and those who have achieved glory. Many are left out of being worthwhile individuals in the societal framework. A more holistic interpretation of society and its people needs to be experienced by pupils in the public schools.

3. emphasizing citizenship. A major objective of service learning should aim at developing good citizens. A good citizen participates in developing an improved society for all, not for the self only. Interacting with members in society, starting at an early age, is reality based and consists of concrete actions to improve the self concept. There is interaction between the individual and others. No one is an island to the self, but must be a builder of bridges to develop good human relations when interacting with others.

4. stressing ethical relations in the societal arena. When actions are taken in service learning, ethics must be a strong consideration in ascertaining what is to be accomplished. The ethical person operates in terms of strong convictions, such as in Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative. Thus, a universal ethic is advocated which should apply to all (Stumpf, 1971).

5. working together harmoniously with others. The ability to function effectively in a group setting is important. Effectiveness stresses the use of quality group dynamics in coming to a consensus to solve a problem. Problems need to be

identified and solved within a committee setting in which all members are actively involved and respect for others is inherent.

All of the above objectives might well be integrated into a quality program of service learning. The attitudinal and affective dimension become one with that of knowledge and skills objectives in service learning. Carter (2001) wrote the following:

Today we are in a critical juncture in education. Our youth are growing up in a world where globalization, technological innovation, economic competition, racial and ethnic diversification, and political change are transforming societies and creating challenges and opportunities. To meet these challenges, today's students need an education that will help them succeed in a rapidly changing world.

The time is ripe for educational change. Recent polls indicate that more and more U. S. citizens want their children to be well versed in civic responsibility as well as in academics. The national media echo the public's concern with student achievement, character building, and safety.

The Psychology of Learning in Community Service

The psychology of learning has much to offer in developing and implementing a quality service learning curriculum. Realistic learning opportunities involving the environment must be in the offing. Parker (2001) wrote the following:

The children in an elementary school near Everett, Washington, decided to do something about a dirty little stream named Pigeon Creek. The children were alarmed that Pigeon Creek had become so dirty that salmon had stopped coming there to lay their eggs, so they "adopted" it.

The first thing the children did was to get an aquarium for their classroom and raise thousands of salmon eggs. Meanwhile, they worked with people in the community to clean up the creek. Litter was removed and and the children put up "DON'T DUMP" signs. When the salmon eggs hatched, the students released them in Pigeon Creek and monitored the creek to keep it clean.

A hands on approach in service learning is then being emphasized. It is quite obvious that in the above example, pupils felt purpose for learning. The purpose was to clean up a creek and reintroduce salmon eggs and life into the natural environment. If pupils feel purpose for learning, they will put forth

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more effort to achieve, an important principle of learning to be stressed in teaching pupils.

In addition to purpose in learning, pupils also need to be successful in achieving, developing, and growing. Ediger, (1999, 1- 5) wrote:

The instructor guides learners to be successful in coursework taken. Sequence in learning is based upon what learners have achieved previously. New facts, concepts, and generalizations obtained are related to what was achieved previously. With quality sequence and order on learning, the learner may attain feeling of success and develop a positive self concept. A good self concept guides students to achieve higher goals in life. Low self concepts greatly hinder students from attaining that which is possible. Objectives for student attainment should not be so high that failure to achieve is an end result. Nor should the objectives be stated at such low levels of complexity that a lack of challenge is in evidence. Challenge for learners is salient if they are to be successful students in education.

Third, interest is a powerful ingredient to stress in reading. With learner interest in community service, effort will be forthcoming in achievement. The ideal of community service then becomes more vivid to the learner with explorations of involvement in the larger social setting. What needs to be done to improve society as a better place for all requires interest in searching for that which provides for objectives of instruction. Learner interest needs to be developed and maintained in service learning.

Fourth, a problem solving approach needs to be used to identify and solve problems. Which areas of the community might then be selected to further service learning? Deliberation and study are necessary to come up with worthwhile problems to pursue. Pupils with teacher guidance should choose those relevant problems to solve which stress service to the community. Once selected problems have been chosen, then information needs to be gathered in answer to these problems. Comprehensive information needs to be sought. The answer becomes an hypothesis which is tentative and subject to testing in a life-like situation as the community service project proceeds. Bloome and Harste (2001) wrote:

The stereotype of the intellectual as removed from the world bears little resemblance to what we know to be the case. For us, being an intellectual means engaging the world, acting on it and in it, reflecting on and learning from the events around us and from our interactions with others. It also means being political,

as there can be no thought or action that is neutral with regard to social justice. It is hard to grow, however, as a teacher and as an intellectual in isolation. Literacy and knowledge isn't about having the "right" information and advocating for it. Knowledge is dynamic, critical, and reflective...

Fifth, the best of research needs to be incorporated into service learning projects. Items such as pupils relating what is participated in presently with that which was preciously learned is vital. Also that which is being learned tends to be integrated, not separated into component academic areas. The language arts, the social studies, science, and mathematics, among others, needs to be perceived as integrated, not as separate entities. Thus, for example, there are a plethora of opportunities for pupils to be actively engaged in the language arts with reading/writing connections (See Ediger, 1985, 22-25).

Sixth, research needs to be conducted on the local level pertaining to pupil involvement in service projects. An experimental study involving a new treatment, such as a pupil with teacher guidance model, versus a teacher directed community service project, needs to be studied. The former as compared with the latter teacher directed project needs to be clearly defined in terms of differences so that research may be done between the two approaches. A survey of the educational literature on community service must be inherent in the research project. If possible, random sampling procedures need to be emphasized in the research study whereby participants are selected, using a Table of Random Numbers or computerized randomization is used. A pretest and a post test need to be given to both the treatment (pupils with teacher guidance) and the teacher directed experiences (traditional curriculum of service learning) for pupils. A carefully chosen standardized or school developed assessment needs to be used to evaluate under which conditions do pupils achieve best, in a quality service learning curriculum. Critical and creative thinking, as well as problem solving, are definitely involved in doing a research study.

A survey method might also be used in conducting research whereby a carefully developed questionnaire may be administered to pupils and another to teachers to determine which methods of teaching best meet needs of either. Clearly worded items in the questionnaire should be included in which pupils and the teacher rate the value of each on a five point scale. Approximately twelve items should be included in the questionnaire. The following item, as an example, may then be assessed from a "poor" to a "very good" rating: I believe

problem solving should be strongly emphasized in teaching. The results need to be tabulated and studied for each of the twelve items to obtain feedback on possible revisions to be made in teaching (See Ediger, 1998, 551- 557).

Seventh, pupils possess different learning styles and these need to be considered when community service activities are in evidence. Under what conditions do pupils learn most optimally is the basis of emphasis in learning styles theory. Thus, for example, pupils may learn best individually as compared to cooperative learning (Searson and Dunn, 2001).

Eighth, multiple intelligences theory also needs incorporation as activities for pupil participation since there are a plethora of ways pupils may reveal what has been learned in community service. Dramatizations, art projects, construction activities, among others, are ways to show to others that which has been learned (See Gardner, 1993).

Portfolio and Assessment

Pupil achievement needs to be assessed and documented. A portfolio approach may be used to indicate learner achievement in community service. The portfolio contents show actual engagement of pupils in service learning. The following products might well become inherent in a pupil portfolio:

1. snapshots of the pupil engaged in a hands on approach in learning.
2. digital camcorder pictures on internet of the pupils involvement in community service.
3. written summaries of actual experiences in the ongoing unit of study.
4. a cassette recorded pupil book report on using the community in learning.
5. a video tape indicating the learner's achievement in working within a collaborative setting.
6. diary entries written by the involved pupil showing daily entries of experiences in sequential community service endeavors.
7. journal writing reflecting upon values in doing service leaning activities.
8. self evaluation on what has been learned and what is left to achieve in previous lessons on service learning. Test results may also be included in the portfolio.
9. logs written which summarize the integration of the language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics into the curriculum. Actual experiences need to be summarized.

10. drawings made on experiences in the community as well as art projects developed, such as a mural, on a facet of the unit on service learning (See Ediger, 2000, 29-34).

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